

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1228

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 COLOMBO 1837

EO 11652: GDS

TAGSC PFOR, PINT, ECON, CE

SUBJ: QUARTERLY OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS,
APRIL-JUNE 1974

REF: COLOMBO 1719, 1691, 876 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: THERE HAS BEEN REMARKABLE CHANGE OF POLITICAL
MOOD IN SRI LANKA IN PAST THREE MONTHS. FROM DEEP DISCOURAGE-
MENT IN MARCH, GOV'T IS NOW CONFIDENT, OWING MAINLY
TO APRIL 20 CLAMP-DOWN ON OPPOSITION, TO LARGE TURN-
OUTS AT UNITED FRONT RALLIES, AND TO SOME AMELIORATION
IN ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, ALYLEAII FOR SHORT RUN. RENEWED
BELIEF ON PART LEFTIST AND RADICAL ELEMENTS OF UNITED
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FRONT COALITION IN POPULAR SUPPORT

FOR SOCIALIST POLICIES MAY IN FUTURE INCREASE POSSIBILITY OF SPLIT WITHIN GOVT ON IDEOLOGICAL AND PERSONAL LINES. ALTHOUGH ON ECONOMIC SIDE DEPENDENCE ON FOOD IMPORTS REMAINS FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM, SRI LANKA'S EXPORT PERFORMANCE HAS IMPROVED SOMEWHAT AND IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS FOR ECONOMY ARE SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN EARLIER THIS YEAR, ONE IMPORTANT REASON BEING DOUBLING OF WESTERN AID COMMITMENTS. IN FOREIGN POLICY, SRI LANKA HAS TRIED TO STEER CLEAR OF THORNY ISSUES AND HAS RETAINED OPEN LINES TO ALL SHADES OF INTERNATIONAL OPINION. OUR OWN RELATIONS WITH CEYLONSE CONTINUE GOOD, AS REFLECTED IN ANNOUNCEMENT OF \$8 MILLION NEW DEVELOPMENT LOAN AND EQUITABLE SETTLEMENT OF LONG-STANDING LOAN REPAYMENT PROBLEM. END SUMMARY.

2. TOPSY-TURVY POLITICS: MOST NOTABLE FEATURE OF LAST THREE MONTHS HAS BEEN REMARKABLE CHANGE IN POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE. CURRENT MOOD VARIES FROM BUOYANCY AMONG UNITED FRONT GOVT (UFG) RANKS TO WARY CAUTION AMONG OPPOSITION SUPPORTERS ANXIOUS ABOUT THEIR FUTURE PROSPECTS, A SIGNIFICANT REVERSAL OF PREVAILING CURRENTS OF JAN-APRIL PERIOD. SUDDENLY APRIL'S CLIMATE OF DOOM AMONG UF SUPPORTER -- ARISING FROM FEARS OF INADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLIES AND LACK OF SHORT-TERM CASH, SUSPICION OF UNRELIABILITY OF ARMY AND POLICE, DOUBTS CONCERNING LOYALTY OF SLFP BACKBENCHERS, AND EXAGGERATED VIEW OF EFFICACY OF UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) MACHINATIONS -- HAS DISAPPEARED FROM SIGHT. MOOD NOW WITHIN UF IS THAT UNP OVERPLAYED ITS HAND, OVERESTIMATED ITS POPULAR SUPPORT, PLAYED INTO GOVT'S HAND, AND IS NOW BEING BUFFETED BY EFFECTIVE UF COUNTER-OFFENSIVE.

3. KEY MILESTONE IN REACHING NEW POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT WAS APRIL 20-21 RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY PRIME MINISTER

BANDARANAIKE ON ACTIVITIES OF OPPOSITION UNP AND HER CLOSURE OF ANTI-UF SUN NEWSPAPER GROUP. RESTRICTIONS HAD EFFECT OF ABRUPTLY TERMINATING UNP'S STRATEGY OF CONFRONTATION WITH GOVT WHILE INFUSING UF WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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GREATER CONFIDENCE. COALITION OPTIMISM HAS BEEN BUOYED BY VERY LARGE TURN OUTS AT RALLIES ACROSS COUNTRY, AN ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT BY UF PARTY THAT WOULD HAVE SEEMED HIGHLY IMPROBABLE ONLY FEW MONTHS AGO. OPTIMISM DRAWS MUCH OF ITS FORCE FROM TIDE OF LAND CONFISCATION NOW UNDER WAY AS AUG 22 DEADLINE FOR COMPLETION OF LAND REFORM PROCESS APPROACHES. WHEN PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER CABINET MINISTERS ARE

ASKED PRIVATELY TO WHAT
THEY ATTRIBUTE LARGE CROWDS
AT UF POLITICAL RALLIES, THEY USUALLY QUICKLY REPLY
"LAND REFORM". FUNDAMENTAL CONVICTION AMONG ALL THREE
UF COALITION PARTIES THAT UF'S SOCIALIST POLICIES GIVE
IT BROAD AND DEEP SUPPORT IS ENJOYING NEW LEASE ON
LIFE AND COULD SPUR ACCELERATION OF SOCIALIST
LEGISLATION.

4. UNP'S PRE-APRIL 20 CHALLENGE HAS ALSO LED TO
CLOSING OF RANKS AMONG COALITION PARTIES. THE DIVIDED
COMMUNIST PARTY, MOSCOW-WING WAS
REUNIFIED JULY 3, WHILE ELSEWHERE THE TROTSKYITE-
CONTROLLED TRADE UNIONS HAVE CEASED THEIR THINLY VEILED
THREATS OF STRIKE ACTION. LATENT RIFTS EXIST, HOWEVER,
AS COALITIONS LEFTWARD DOMESTIC COURSE BECOMES IN-
CREASINGLY PRONOUNCED. ONE OF SPECIAL INTEREST IS
BURGEONING RIVALRY BETWEEN PRIME MINISTERS SON AND
HEIR-APPARENT ANURA BANDARANAIKE, AND SON-IN-LAW
KUMAR JFPASINGHE, LEADER OF RADICAL JANAVEGAYA
FACTION. LONG ANTICIPATED, SUCH BREACH COULD
POLARIZE OLD LEFT ESTABLISHMENT OF LANKA SAMA
SW AJA PARTY (LSSP) AND SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY
(SLFP) ON ANURA'S SIDE AGAINST YOUNGER, MORE
RADICAL RUPASINGHE GROUP WHOSE INFLUENCE ON POLICY
AND BUREAUCRACY HAS BEEN SPREADING. ONE OF THIS,
HOWEVER, SEEMS TO HAVE ANY IMPACT ON MRS BANDARANAIKE'S UNQUESTIONED
PRIMACY, BASED ON
HER UNIMPAIRED CAPACITY TO DOMINATE NATIONAL
POLITICS, TO MANIPULATE POLITICIANS, TO DEFINE
ISSUES AND GROUND RULES, AND TO CONTAIN INTERNAL
DISPUTES.

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5. ELATION WHICH CHARACTERIZES MUCH CURRENT UF
THINKING COULD EVAPORATE OVERNIGHT, PARTICULARLY
IF FOOD RATIONS HAVE TO BE CUT BACK. SOME OF IT
REFLECTS RELIEF AT BEING SPARED PRESSURES OF NAGGING
CRITICISM FROM OPPOSITION. MUCH SEEMS TO REFLECT
GROWING TENDENCY TO BELIEVE ONE'S OWN PROPAGANDA.
FEW RECALL THAT UP TO THE LAST DAY BEFORE HIS MAY
1970 ELECTION DEFEAT, DUDLEY SENANAYAKE WAS DRAWING
LARGE AND EXUBERANT CROWDS, AND MANY FORGET THAT
BY-ELECTIONS ARE PERHAPS BETTER TEST OF GOVTS
POPULARITY THAN TURN-OUTS AT POLITICAL RALLIES.
FOR MOMENT, HOWEVER, OPPOSITION IS IN NO POSITION TO
CHALLENGE UFG. UNP IS POORLY EQUIPPED TO
FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY IN CONTEXT OF EVEN PARTIAL
REPRESSION. IT HAS DROPPED CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

LINE IN FAVOR OF BUILDING PARTY ORGANIZATION AT
GRASS-ROOTS LEVEL, A JOB LONG OVERDUE.

6. OPTIMISM ON ECONOMIC SIDE: SOME OF AGGRESSIVE
CONFIDENCE NOW PERVADEING UFG CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO
TEMPORARY EASING OF LIQUIDITY AND FOOD COMMODITY
SUPPLY PROBLEMS THAT WERE ACUTE EARLIER IN YEAR.
ATTITUDE SEEMS ACTUALLY TO RESULT FROM DECEPTIVE
BELIEF THAT PATCHWORK OF EMERGENCY PURCHASES TO-
GETHER WITH CURRENT FOOD CAMPAIGN HAVE SUCCEEDED
IN ENSURING ADEQUATE FOOD SUPPLY FOR INDEFINITE
FUTURE. IT IS TRUE THAT WHAT WAS EARLIER A
SUPPLY PROBLEM, WITH FOOD TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE
FROM ANY SOURCE AT ANY PRICE, IS NOW A DELICATELY
BALANCED FINANCIAL PROBLEM. SUPPLIES OF FOOD HAVE
BECOME AVAILABLE THROUGH SLIGHTLY LARGER RICE
HARVEST THAN ANTICIPATED BY IMPROVED GOVT PROCUREMENT
OF RICE FROM PRODUCERS; AND REGULAR ARRIVAL
OF IMPORTED FOODSTUFFS BOUGHT DURING FIRST QUARTER.
GSL NOW HAS FOOD STOCKS TO SERVICE FOOD RATION ON
MONTHLY, INSTEAD OF WEEKLY, BASIS. CAPABILITY IS
TEMPORARY, HOWEVER, AND CUTBACKS AGAIN MAY BE
NECESSARY BEFORE END OF YEAR.

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7. EVENTS OF LAST THREEMONTHS HAVE ALSO
DEMONSTRATED TO UF, ESPECIALLY SLFP, POLITICAL
PAY-OFF OF CERTAIN POLICY CHANGES IN FAVOR
AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. HIGHER GUARANTEED PADDY
PRICE HAS INCREASED GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO BUY
PADDY IN SURPLUS AREAS. EXPANDED CREDIT FLOW

THROUGHOUT NATION'S RURAL SECTOR CONTINUES. COMBINED
WITH HIGH DEMAND AT HIGH PRICES, IT HAS GENERATED
SMALL BOOM IN REAL INCOME AND PURCHASING POWER FOR
SOME FARMERS. THIS PATTERN STANDS IN SHARP CONTRAST
TO STILL-FALLING URBAN REAL INCOME AND PERSONAL CON-
SUMPTION AND MAY BE BEGINNING OF SALUTARY INCREASE
IN STATUS AND ATTRACTION OF LONG-NEGLECTED LARGE
AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. FOR FIRST TIME ALSO, UF IS
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COMMITTED TO BETTER DEAL FOR TEA AND RUBBER PRODUCERS
WITH TAX AND CREDIT BREAKS UNDER CONSIDERATION TO
STIMULATE RENEWED INVESTMENT IN COUNTRY'S MAIN
EXPORT INDUSTRIES.

8. TOURISM, GEMS, AND NON-TRADITIONAL EXPORTS
CONTINUE THEIR RELATIVELY IMPROVED PERFORMANCES.
ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND MONETARY SIDE, SRI LANKA
HAS HELD THE LINE IN LAST THREE MONTHS. ALTHOUGH
SRI LANKA IS AMONG "MOST SERIOUSLY AFFECTED" BY
STEEP FOOD AND OIL PRICES, EXPORT PRICES OF
CEYLONese RUBBER HAVE BEEN HIGH SINCE LAST YEAR
AND TEA HAS ALSO RISEN RECENTLY. THESE TWO
CROPS COMPRISE ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF ALL COMMODITY
EXPORTS.

9. IBRD REPORT AND RESULTING AID GROUP PLEDGES
HAVE ENCOURAGED MODERATE DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE
AMONG FOREIGN LENDING INSTITUTIONS. SHORT-TERM
LINES OF CREDIT FROM EUROPEAN AND U.S. BANKS
HAVE HELPED TIDE OVER CREDIT CRUNCH EXPERIENCED
IN EARLY MAY. BANKS MAY ALSO HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT
ENCOURAGED BY IMPROVEMENT IN EXPORT SECTOR. ALL OF
THIS SHOULD NOT SUGGEST ANY FUNDAMENTAL IMPROVEMENT
IN SRI LANK'S ECONOMIC PROSPECTS. COUNTRY HAS

EARNED MODEST DEGREE OF OPTIMISM ON PART OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WITH CONSEQUENCES HAVING IMMEDIATE FEEDBACK INTO ITS DOMESTIC POLICS, BUT IT IS LIMITED RESPITE AT BEST. EVEN UNDER MOST FAVORABLE ASSUMPTIONS CONCERNING 1974 HARVESTS AND AVAILABILITY OF FOREIGN RESOURCES, SRI LANKA'S FOOD SUPPLIES WILL REMAIN PRECARIOUS FOR MONTHS TO COME. INADEQUATE DOMESTIC PRODUCTION AND RESULTING DEPENDENCE ON COSTLY FOREIGN FOOD IMPORTS REMAIN ACHILLES HEEL OF CEYLONESE ECONOMY. CURRENT IMPROVED EXPORT PERFORMANCE COULD GIVE SRI LANKA CHANCE TO ACCUMULATE CAPITAL SURPLUS NECESSARY FOR BASIC INVESTMENT PURPOSES WERE IT NOT FOR FOOD BURDEN. MUCH STRONGER POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND MORE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SCARCE RESOURCES ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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REQUIRED TO MAKE COUNTRY SELF-SUFFICIENT IN FOOD, BUT MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE FIRST STEPS IN RIGHT DIRECTION HAVE BEEN TAKEN.

10. NON-FOOD CONSUMER AND RAW MATERIAL IMPORTS HAVE BEEN HEAVILY CUT BACK, AND REQUIREMENTS FOR SIMPLY MAINTAINING CAPITAL STOCK CONTINUE TO BE UNMET. EQUIPMENT IN TEA AND RUBBER ESTATES IS DETERIORATING, AND SUCH DIVERSE SECTORS AS IRRIGATION PROJECTS, OIL REFINING, HARBOR FACILITIES, RAILROAD STOCK, AND HOUSING HAVE BEEN NEGLECTED. RECENT IMPROVEMENTS IN SHORT-TERM FOOD AND FINANCIAL SITUATION HAVE REDUCED PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THESE CONTINUING LONG-TERM RAVAGES TO ECONOMY, BUT PRESENT MOOD OF ENCOURAGEMENT COULD DETERIORATE AS CONSEQUENCES OF CAPITAL DISINVESTMENT BECOME MORE APPARENT. FOR MOMENT, GSL HAS ROOM TO MANEUVER ON ECONOMIC FRONT AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF PESSIMISM.

11. FOREIGN RELATIONS: GSL'S ALMOST COMPLETE ABSORPTION IN ITS DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS LEFT LITTLE ENERGY FOR FOREIGN POLICY FIELD. EVENTS OF PAST THREE MONTHS REVEALED NO DEVIATION FROM ESTABLISHED PRACTICE OF SIDE-STEPPING ISSUES OVER WHICH CEYLONESE HAVE LITTLE INFLUENCE. IMPENDING AUTONOMY FOR PORTUGAL'S AFRICAN COLONIES HAS GENERATED ONLY POLITELY EXPRESSED SATISFACTION. EVEN CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS WHICH WOULD APPEAR TO CONFLICT WITH AMBITIONS OF SRI LANKA'S OWN INDIAN OCEAN PEACE ZONE CONCEPT -- SUCH AS FRENCH AND INDIAN NUCLEAR TESTS, U.S. PLANS FOR DIEGO GARCIA -- HAVE BEEN MET WITH OFFICIAL SILENCE OR RELATIVELY MILD PUBLIC STATE-

MENT, WITH LIMITED DOMESTIC ATTENTION OR
DEBATE. QUITE THE OPPOSITE WAS TRUE OF AN ISSUE
MUCH CLOSER TO HOME: UNIVERSAL ENTHUSIASM GREETED
JUNE 28 AGREEMENT WITH INDIA ACKNOWLEDGING SRI LANKA'S
SOVEREIGNTY OVER ISLET OF KACHCHATIVU, WHICH REMOVED
LAST FUNDAMENTAL MATTER OF CONTENTION WITH BIG
NORTHERN NEIGHBOR. OVER PAST THREE MONTHS SRI LANKA
HAS ALSO MOVED TO IMPROVE ITS BOTCHED RELATIONS WITH
MALDIVES, WITH CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS.
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12. EVENTS CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE SRI LANKA'S LOW-
PROFILE FOREIGN POLICY. IT PAYS HANDSOME DIVIDENDS.
AID PLEDGES, MADE AT MAY MEETING OF WESTERN AID GROUP,
MAY BE DOUBLE THOSE COMMITTED IN 1973. SOVIET AND
CHINESE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE MAY INCREASE IF CURRENT
NEGOTIATIONS FOR EXPANSION OF SOVIET STEEL-
PROCESSING PLANT AND FOR CHINESE AID FOR IRRIGATION AND
FLOOD-CONTROL PROJECTS ARE SUCCESSFUL. MAIN GAP IS
CONTINUING ABSENCE OF ARAB MONEY, ESPECIALLY RESENTED
IN VIEW OF GSL'S STRONG PRO-ARAB POSTURE SINCE 1970.

13. U.S.-SRI LANKA RELATIONS REMAIN GOOD. OUR RECENT
PLEDGE OF \$8 MILLION FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT LOAN
IS NEW CONTRIBUTION TO FURTHERANCE OF THEM. FINAL
SETTLEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED ON MAINTENANCE OF VALUE
(MOV) QUESTION ARISING FROM RUPEE PAYMENTS ON OLD
LOANS, WHICH WAS ONLY OUTSTANDING BILATERAL ISSUE
BETWEEN USG AND GSL. U.S. NAVY SHIP VISIT HAS BEEN
APPROVED FOR LATER THIS MONTH. ON PRIVATE SIDE,
CURRENT PARTICIPATION BY AMERICAN BANKS IN EXTENDING
CREDIT TO GSL COULD ENCOURAGE AMERICAN INTEREST IN
LOCAL INVESTMENT PROSPECTS.

14. ALL IN ALL, THINGS ARE LOOKING SLIGHTLY UP, BUT
OLD HANDS KNOW THAT SITUATION AND ATMOSPHERE CHANGE QUICKLY
HERE, AND IT IS ANYBODY'S GUESS WHAT NEXT QUARTERLY
OVERVIEW WILL BRING.
VAN HOLLEN

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